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ABSTRACT

Education Service Centers do now or can constitute a significant delivery vehicle to help solve one of the stickiest issues facing the Texas Legislature--the equalization of educational opportunity. Remoteness, size of school districts, and taxable valuation all impact the individual district's ability to provide equal educational opportunity. Improved and more extensive strategies for sharing resources are absolutely essential to the survival of small schools and extremely beneficial to the larger ones. If each district were required to maintain all the capabilities to attain and maintain accredited status, the cost to the State would be astronomical. Examples of program support, as well as cost savings, include shared services in educational media, staff development, data processing, special education, adult basic education, migrant education cooperatives, supplemental unit administration, bus driver training, driver education, reproduction and printing, and office machines and audiovisual equipment repair. Small schools must obtain most of these services somewhere, and the Service Center is the State's best vehicle to make them available. An even more intriguing possibility for small schools is the implementation of alternative instructional strategies. While the potential for utilization of Service Centers is just dawning, an increase in the State Base Funding will be necessary to move forward. (BRR)

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Economies Gained by Sharing Resources

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El Paso, Texas

January 1983

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Economies Gained by Sharing Resources

John E. Uxer

A presentation to the Texas Association of Education Service Centers(TAESC)-January 1983

As the Texas Legislature convenes in its 68th Session, education issues, everyone acknowledges, will undoubtedly demand major consideration. The financing of the State's educational enterprise adequately enough to attain and maintain a quality system will top the list of education issues addressed. Teachers' salaries, operation costs, transportation costs, and vocational and special education costs, everyone admits, must be increased. However, perhaps one of the stickiest issues the Legislature must face is the equalization of educational opportunity. Remoteness, size of school districts, and taxable valuation all impact the individual districts ability to provide equal educational opportunity. The matter of vastly differing taxable values is not confined to any one or a few Regions in the State. Although the <u>average</u> property value per student in Region XIX is the lowest in the State, practically every Region has some <u>districts</u> that are equally low.

The Legislature may consider a number of options when determining the best way or ways to provide statewide equalization of educational opportunity, and I submit to you, the Service Centers <u>do now</u> or <u>can</u> constitute a significant delivery vehicle for many such programs.

In my opinion, improved and more extensive strategies for <u>sharing resources</u> are absolutely essential to the survival of small schools—<u>and</u>extremely beneficial to the larger ones. Continuing escalation of costs for goods and services; ever-increasing tax burdens; and the cry for better educated students demand that we discover and utilize innovative solutions to the provision of quality education at affordable costs.

While I would not want to leave the impression that cost savings to school districts (and thus the State) constitute the only rationale for maintenance of Service Centers—and maybe not even the most important one—(coordination of educational planning, implementing legislative and State Board mandates, and responding to local district requests are also essential), nevertheless cost savings are important and that is the focus of this presentation.

I would like to first build the case that every school district, regardless of its size, location, or financial ability, must perform certain functions. Every school must, in order to receive state funding, provide for each of the elements for accreditation. An acceptable plan must be submitted by each school district to the State Board through the Texas Education Agency, and the Agency has the responsibility of monitoring the school district's progress.

Basic functions which must be addressed in each district's accreditation plan include:

1. Establish learning goals (present levels of achievement determined and learning "needs" determined)
2. Conduct a program analysis or "Self Study"
3. Prepare 5 year priorities plan (a set of targeted learning objectives in student goal achievement)
4. Correct, on a short-term basis (less than one year) remaining discrepancies from principles and standards which are not addressed in 5 year plan.
5. Implement the actions outlined in 5 year plan.
6. Monitor and report results to the Agency yearly.
7. Modify school plan as called for by evaluative evidences

8. Submit a copy of the results of the district's final year assessment to the Texas Education Agency

As you can readily see, the implications for support of the districts' efforts to maintain satisfactory accredited status are great. If each district were required to maintain all the capabilities to attain and maintain accredited status, the cost to the State would be astronomical!

I would like to briefly summarize a few of the support areas presently being provided by Service Centers but I'd like to preface this summary with five significant points.

- Education Service Centers are not the only vehicles for achieving cooperative sharing of resources but in my opinion they comprise the most extensive, and, in most cases, the most practical one.
- Not all, or perhaps even a major portion, of school programs should be provided by a cooperative delivery system. I believe the basic school administration and program operation can be best achieved through the local control of an elected school board and administered by a selected superintendent and staff. I do believe, however, that a discerning superintendent and board will mobilize every resource available to them in conducting their educational programs.
- State Board of Education rules require schools with less than 3000 students to join together in cooperatives for the efficient and economical operation of special education programs. If this rationale applies to other areas of

schools' programs (and I believe it does) 904, or 84% of the States' 1069 districts would be included.

- Not all the services cited in this presentation are available in every region—nor should they be because school districts' requirements differ from region to region. One of the great strengths of the Service Centers is the ability to tailor their services rather than being mandated to provide "Standardized" services.
- Finally, it is not the intent of Service Centers to compete with private business or industry or other organizations but to provide the highest quality service to the school districts at the lowest possible cost.

Although it would be impractical to attempt to cite all Service Centers' programs, the following areas, I feel, will dramatically illustrate program support as well as cost savings:

Educational Media - All twenty Service Centers maintain educational media libraries. One of the original purposes for which ESCs were established was to provide educational media to school districts. (The provision of media services is perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of shared services resulting in cost-effectiveness, convenience, and availability of service, plus equalizing educational opportunity.) Media services offered include production and duplication of transparencies, audio and video tape production and duplication, lamination of materials, instructional aid production, photography and cooperative purchasing, as well as the maintenance of 16mm film libraries.

Teachers' use of one Regional library during the 1981-82 school year resulted in 229,619 showings of 16mm educational films at an average cost of 57¢ per showing. Included in the 57¢ per showing is the cost of film storage, cleaning, maintenance, and replacement of damaged footage and delivery to and from each school building served. In this Center, the turn-down rate for film requests last year was about 11%. In other words, teachers receive the film requested on the day needed 89% of the time. Teachers in most of the school districts in this Region use from 60% to 90% of the titles on hand. Therefore, if the regional library did not exist, each school district would need to purchase and service film libraries approaching the cost of the regional library in order to provide the same level of service to their teachers.

The alternative to owning a film library would be to rent films from another source. The Region XIX ESC staff conducted a study a few months ago and discovered that the cost of rental of most films would be prohibitive for most districts. A typical, popular 26-minute color film is "Donald in Mathmagicland." The cost for renting this film from BYU is $30; Iowa State $12.30; U of Wisc. $19; and from Twyman Films, Inc., of Dayton, Ohio, $30. The film must be returned the first working day following screening, and postage both ways must be paid.

Staff Development - Perhaps the most obvious need in public education today is more fully qualified staff members. I doubt that we'll ever obtain a full staff of fully qualified staff members—but that, nevertheless, should be the goal of every school board.

How does a school district address this need? Certainly the recruiting of the best qualified persons available is a first step but, beyond that, the school district must have a plan for development of the talents of the people who are working for the school. And every staff member is a candidate for such development!

In larger schools with several persons in each job assignment, a staff development program can probably be successfully implemented within the school system, but in smaller schools, the job is much more difficult. For instance, most small schools will have only one high school and one or two elementary schools. Some may have a junior high. Small schools may have only one chemistry teacher and one math teacher in the high school. It is very difficult, if not impractical, to conduct meaningful staff development programs when there is only one, or a very few, persons in each job assignment.

The superintendent of a small school rarely has the staff flexibility to employ a person to organize and implement staff development programs so he has to handle this program in addition to business affairs, transportation, cafeterias, building maintenance and curriculum development.

The answer, of course, is for the school district to join with other districts and organize cooperative staff development programs. According to reports submitted to the Texas Education Agency, during the 1980-81 school year, the Education Service Centers of Texas conducted workshops for approximately 100,000 teachers and administrators.

Except for providing educational media, staff development programs are the most often mentioned activity of Service Centers. The quality of regional inservice (or staff development programs) is a matter of record and cost savings are well documented

but have not been adequately publicized. Examples in two regions typify the savings available throughout the State. Following are quotations from Regions XVI and XII respectively:

"Collectively, seven inservice clusters provided 25 inservice days in 1981-82 at a cost of approximately $50,000. Three thousand five hundred teachers received three or four days training at an average cost of $14.00 per day per teacher. To illustrate more specifically the cost effectiveness of this approach, one cluster consisted of eight school districts with a total staff of 325 people. Four days of inservice activity were provided offering teachers a selection of 53 topics. The cluster expended $5500 for the four days, an average of $16.92 per teacher—$4.23 per teacher per day. If each district had offered the same or similar kind of program to its staff independent of the cluster, the total cost would have been $44,000 for the eight districts. Obviously, each district would not have provided an inservice program that cost over $5000. Also, it is not likely that the cluster inservice concept would have developed had it not been for Service Center leadership and support. Most of all, the quality of the inservice program provided for the district staff would have been much less if not for the clustering for inservice."

"The total cost of providing 103 Summer Staff Development Workshops was $22,574.64 with a per participant cost of $7.35. Since all of the summer workshops were funded from categorical project funds named previously, these workshops were provided to school personnel in Region XII at no cost to the school or to the participant other than the travel

cost that might have been incurred by the participant in driving to the workshop sites. No registration fees were charged for any of these workshops during 1982. This appears to be a very cost effective method for providing staff development workshops for approximately 3,000 educators representing over 80 schools in Region XII. Each participant received a workshop participation certificate which most of the school districts recognized for providing compensatory inservice time for professional personnel. In addition to being very cost effective, evaluation reports indicate that this method of providing inservice training is very palatable and beneficial to the participating administrators, teachers and aides in Region XII."

Are other means of providing staff development available to schools? The answer, of course, is yes. The alternatives—employment by each district of additional staff for this function, develop independent cooperatives with one school coordinating the activity, or utilize other outside resources such as University Workshops.

The first alternative is really impractical because of the high costs. The second alternative is sound but the coordinating district would have to employ at least as many extra satff members as the Service Center as well as further overloading the superintendent. The third alternative also has possibilities but costs are generally prohibitive. For example, announcements of staff development seminars by three Universitites—two in Texas and one in New Mexico—came across

my desk in December 1982. One program, "Increasing Productivity through Performance Evaluation" cost $125 per participant for a 1½ day workshop. The second from the University in New Mexico listed eight workshops each of which were either two or three days in length and cost $250 per participant per workshop. The third announcement listed five workshops which would be appropriate for school personnel. Each of the seminars are one-day in length and cost from $165 to $195 per participant. I am confident that every one of the sessions would be high-quality presentations but the very same topics are routinely presented by most Service Centers at a fraction of the cost.

Cooperative Purchasing - A basic principle of economy is volume-purchasing. Some brief examples will illustrate how this program saves school districts money. One Region received a bid for 25,000 reams of xerographic and mineograph paper for delivery on August 6, 1982. The cost of this paper was 28% below the lowest price which could be located for a small order placed on July 23, 1982. Another Region received a bid for 200 program diskettes of $1.89 per diskette. This was 36% below the best price quoted for a small order. Region VI volume purchases audiovisual projection lamps at 38% below small-order prices while Region XX purchases microcomputer systems for schools at a 30% savings.

Other Programs: Other Service Center programs in which significant cost savings accrue to school districts include:

Data Processing

Significant savings accrue to school districts by:

- Cooperative ownership of expensive hardware
- Minimizing the number of staff required
- Cooperative development of application programs

Special Education

- Programs for low-incidence handicaps such as visual impairment
- Appriasal, consultative and program development services
- special materials
- special staff development

Adult Basic Education

- one Region provides these services for 25 school districts for an administrative cost of $1820 per district—about the amount of a one-third-time secretary.

Migrant Education Cooperatives

- a number of the Centers have these cooperatives. A typical Region has an administrative cost of $3780 per cooperating district which is a fraction of the total cost if each district were to have independent programs.

Supplemental Unit Administration

- The present foundation school program provides partial (16) units to small schools to be used cooperatively. Service Centers administering these units minimize the cost of administration.

Bus Driver Training

- the total cost of bus driver training for the State is approximately $500,000 per year. If each district were to conduct their own training the cost would be several times this amount.

Driver Education

- a number of the Centers conduct driver education programs

for their school districts. In Region VI, the total cost per student for a three-phase program (classroom, simulation, and in-car) is $106 per student. The statewide average cost in 1980-81 was $136 per student.

Reproduction and Printing

- Several Service Centers provide this service for school districts. In one documented instance, 100 copies of a 10-page handout cost $84.80 if done commercially while the total cost at the Center was $33—a savings of $61%.

Office Machines and Audiovisual Equipment Repair

- Several Centers provide this service. In Region XIX the cost to school districts is about 1/3 the cost of outside repair service.

As cited previously, most of the services mentioned are services which small schools—and many times larger schools as well—must obtain from somewhere and I feel the Service Center is the State's best vehicle to make them available.

An even more intriguing—and practical—possibility for small schools is the implementation of alternative instructional strategies. No educator interested in students would deny that every student should have the opportunity to take physics or chemistry, or a foreign language, even though only a very few students have this desire. Most small schools cannot locate nor attract fully qualified teachers in these areas. Moreover, if they could locate such teachers, very few would be satisfied to teach other subjects for most of the school day. However, if two, three, or four schools had the same demands, they could, by consolidating and organizing resources, utilize itinerant professional staff, computer assistance, video and other electronics and teaching assistants to offer a quality program.

I believe the potential for utilization of Service Centers to enrich and equalize the State's educational enterprise is just dawning. A more adequate amount of State Base Funding is necessary, however, to move forward.